

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Galatians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	15		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE GOSPEL AND THE SPIRIT

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to a group of churches who were tempted to think that there is another, more complete gospel which will bring them into greater fullness of blessing. The Judaizers contended that Paul's gospel was only the first step. "Paul's message of faith is not totally repudiated by the bearers of the new gospel: they recognize faith as the way to initial salvation. But they believe that faith should be supplemented by fuller obedience to God's will and that this fuller obedience will be honored by God through a fuller gift of his Spirit or salvation. The new message was thus earnest, plausible, appealing and based on the Bible . . . and therefore it was *bewitching*, that is, attractive."¹ Over the last decade or so we have seen a number of professing Reformed folks arguing that because of the ever-present threat of antinomianism, we need to avoid *easy-believism* and underscore the importance of our cooperation with grace and ongoing faithfulness. John Piper, for example, says we begin with faith but we *continue* into salvation by our cooperation with grace and good works.² *Allein durch den glauben*: this is how Luther translated that key phrase in Romans 3:28 in his German Bible. His Roman Catholic opponents accused him of grossly perverting the Scripture by inserting the word *allein* (alone) into the text. Charles Hodge points out that Catholic translations, long before Luther, had rendered the passage the same way. *The Nuremberg Bible* of 1483 reads *Nur* (only) *durch den glauben*, and even more surprising is the *Italian Bibles* of Geneva (1476) and Venice (1538) read *per sola fide*.³ Luther responded to his critics by saying, "Note, then, whether Paul does not assert more vehemently that faith alone justifies than I do, although he does not use the word *alone* (*sola*), which I have used. For he who says: Works do not justify, but faith justifies, certainly affirms more strongly that faith justifies than does he who says: Faith alone justifies . . . It is ridiculous enough to argue in this sophistical manner: Faith alone justifies; therefore the Holy Spirit does not justify. Or: The Spirit justifies; therefore not faith alone. For this is not what the dispute is about at this place. Rather the question is only about the relation of faith and works, whether anything is to be ascribed to works in justification. Since the apostle does not ascribe anything to them, he without a doubt ascribes all to faith alone."⁴ Strange as it would appear, Luther's critics today include people who *claim* to be the true heirs of Calvin and the real representatives of the Reformed faith. Norman Shepherd (and his followers in *The Federal Vision*, i.e., Rich Lusk) contends that a genuine Reformed understanding of justification is substantively different than Luther's.⁵ In fact, Shepherd is of the opinion that Luther's German translation of Rom. 3:28, "actually distorts Paul's meaning."⁶ Why? Because this would, in Shepherd's mind, "cancel out the teaching of James," (2:24).⁷ We will examine that passage in James later in this series, but for now let us turn our attention to Paul's

statement in Rom. 3:28. Was Luther, as Roman Catholic and Norman Shepherd contend, distorting the Apostle's meaning? Or was Luther (and the rest of the Reformers) right?⁸

- I. **SALVATION BY FAITH: ARGUMENT FROM EARLY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.** The Apostle appeals to the Galatians' salvation experience, to the Scriptures and, in connection with both, to logical reasoning. Note how Paul interrogates them.
 - A. **Question: How did you receive the Spirit? (3:1, 2).** The refutation of the arguments of the Judaizers begins by pointing the Galatians back to their own experience. They were Gentiles. Paul did not come preaching the Law, and they should remember that their experience with the Holy Spirit was the result of the gospel that Paul preached. The word "only" (KJV, NASB), translated in the NIV with the expression "just one thing," in verse 2 indicates that the Apostle is willing to rest his whole case upon this one question, namely, *How did you receive the Spirit?* "And in the light of their experience they could do no other – they had conceded Paul's case: the ground was taken away from the judaizing argument."⁹ Since the Galatians were without the Law before the Judaizers made their appearance, then it is clear that circumcision is ruled out as part of the gospel. It was in *the hearing of faith* as over against *the works of the Law* that they experienced the Spirit.
 - B. **Question: Why are you so foolish? (3:3).** The word *foolish* is the same word Paul used in verse 1, "Foolish Galatians!" They were unreflecting or thoughtless. This question is designed to get the Galatians to analyze their faith. Do they really believe that what is *begun* in the Spirit (by faith) will be *completed* in the flesh (by works)?

Note: Paul is referring to faith here in the active sense. This is captured in the Latin phrase *fides qua creditur* – the faith by which the believer receives the message. It is faith subjectively considered. *Fides quae creditur* (note the difference here – *quae* as opposed to *qua*) refers to *the* faith which is believed, i.e., the content of faith objectively considered.

- C. **Question: Have you experienced so many things needlessly? (3:4).** The word translated *suffer* (NIV) is *paschō*, which means to experience pain or hardship. There is no reference to the Galatians having been persecuted for their faith like the Thessalonian Christians were (1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4), and it is possible that the word *paschō* is being used here in a broad sense of *experience*, i.e., your various experiences that came as a result of believing the gospel. These would be emptied of meaning (vain) if Paul's gospel is wrong.
- D. **Question: How does the Spirit work among you? (3:5).** It is God the Father who gives the Spirit. The word in the NIV translated "give" is *epichorēgeō*. It means to supply abundantly. It was used in Classical Greek of a wealthy benefactor assuming the expenses for some public good. God gave the Spirit in the gospel. This is Paul's point. The gospel is all-sufficient, not only at the beginning of the Christian experience, but also for the continuing and fulfilling of the Christian life.

CONCLUSION: If this gospel is to be received by faith, apart from works, then this means that faith cannot be a work. We should never, therefore, define faith as something that we *do* as if it really has its origin in us. This makes faith a work. Faith, as the Bible defines it, is something that comes from God. The hearing of faith that Paul speaks of here is made possible by the presence of the message

of faith. Faith is that which emanates from God's gospel to the recipient. It is God's work and gift. John Piper and the advocates of The New Perspective on Paul (N. T. Wright) as well as Norman Shepherd and representatives of The Federal Vision (Rich Lusk) share in common with the medieval Roman Catholic Church some very similar positions. We get "in" by grace, but we maintain our "standing" by our personal obedience, i.e., justification is two-fold by grace and also ultimately by works. "According to the Council of Trent, one *got in* by baptism, which could hardly be regarded as a human work of the infant. This is the *first justification*. But one's subsequent status (*second justification*) depended on cooperation with infused grace. *Final justification* referred to the last judgment, which involves a divine weighing of good works against transgressions. The reformers challenged this entire paradigm by insisting that one not only gets in but stays in by grace *alone*. They realized that the law, which we could *not* fulfill, nevertheless *had* to be fulfilled. Clearly, this involves some notion of merit: either Christ's or our own personal obedience. Paul's contrast between *the righteousness which is by the law* and *the righteousness which is by faith* (Romans 10:5-6, *passim*) is that of the reformers as well. Of course, there is a final vindication of God's elect on Judgment Day, but the point of the doctrine of justification is to say that this eschatological verdict has already been rendered in the present. There are not two verdicts: one dependent on Christ's obedience, the other on ours – getting in by grace, staying in by obedience."¹⁰ Whatever else Wright, Shepherd and Lusk are advocating, one thing is most certainly true, their positions have more in common with Roman Catholicism than Luther, Calvin and the Reformed confessions. More importantly, their views on justification are not the view of Paul and the Apostles.

ENDNOTES

¹ F. D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 237.

² John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith In Future Grace* (Multnomah, 1995), p. 248.

³ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary On Romans* (rpt. 1972, Banner of Truth), p. 100.

⁴ *What Luther Says: An Anthology II* compiled by E. M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), p. 707.

⁵ Among those echoing Shepherd's position on Luther vs. Calvin include Doug Wilson, "A Pauline Take on The New Perspective," *Credenda/Agenda* (Vol. 15, No. 5); John Armstrong in *Reformation & Revival Journal: Justification: Modern Reflections* (Vol. 11, No. 2, Spring 2002), p. 189. In this same issue articles by P. Andrew Sandlin "Lutheranized Calvinism and Norman Shepherd "Justification by Faith Alone," all take this tact. Most astounding is the claim of Shepherd that the Westminster Standards do not use the formula *justification by faith alone*. He says, "Neither the Confession nor the Catechism say that we are justified by faith alone," (p. 76). He later admits that the WFC *does* declare, "faith is the alone instrument of justification" (XL:2) but this, he maintains, is a different emphasis because of the way it is worded. This kind of sophistry is exasperating. W. Stanford Reid records he was "very put off with Norman's conduct of himself in all the discussions which the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary had with him. He almost never answered a question frankly or directly. If anyone quoted a statement from the Confession, the catechism or the Bible, he would always agree, and then go on with one of his *buts*, which virtually nullified the protasis of his statement. If on the other hand, one asked him a question, almost always he answered by asking a question in return." *Exasperation* is how Reid and many others felt when dealing with Shepherd. One can see why! A. Donald MacLeod, *W. Stanford Reid: An Evangelical Calvinist in The Academy* (Mcill-Queen Univ. Press, 2004), p. 262.

⁶ Shepherd, *op. cit.* p. 87.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 88.

⁸ Calvin agreed wholeheartedly with Luther. He wrote, “Now the reader sees how fairly the Sophists today cavil against our doctrine when we say that man is justified by faith alone [Rom. 3:28]. They dare not deny that man is justified by faith because it recurs so often in Scripture. But since the word “alone” is nowhere expressed, they do not allow this addition to be made. Is it so? But what will they reply to these words of Paul where he contends that righteousness cannot be of faith unless it be free [Rom. 4:2 ff.]? How will a free gift agree with works? With what chicaneries will they elude what he says in another passage that God’s righteousness is revealed in the gospel [Rom. 1:17]? If righteousness is revealed in the gospel, surely no mutilated or half righteousness but a full and perfect righteousness is contained there. The law therefore has no place in it. Not only by a false but by an obviously ridiculous shift they insist upon excluding this adjective. Does not he who takes everything from works firmly enough ascribe everything to faith alone? What, I pray, do these expressions mean: *His righteousness has been manifested apart from the law* [Rom. 3:21 p.]; and, *Man is freely justified* [Rom. 3:24 p.]; and, *Apart from the works of the law* [Rom. 3:28]?” *Institutes of the Christian Religion* trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill (Westminster Press, 1975) BK. III. Ch. 11, sec. 19. W. Stanford Reid, a colleague of Shepherd at Westminster was well-aware of Shepherd’s efforts to divide the two reformers. As one of the most respected church historians of the 20th cent., Reid marshaled an impressive testimony from Calvin’s own writings to counter Shepherd’s claims. He observed that the position Shepherd was advancing did have historical roots – but it is Richard Baxter and *not* the Reformers (especially Calvin) that mirror Shepherd’s views. “Richard Baxter and others even came to be known as *new-nomians* because of their stress upon good works, as though they were an aid in obtaining justification. And this attitude has continued in some circles even to our own day, when some Reformed theologians could term the doctrine of justification by faith alone as *easy believism* and insist that such a doctrine is Lutheran rather than Reformed. For these reasons it would seem to be a good thing to look back to one who is recognized as the theologian who largely formulated the basic Reformed doctrines in the sixteenth century. Moreover, that he was a contemporary of Martin Luther and new exactly what Luther was teaching helps us to understand whether or not he was in favor of Luther’s formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith. If he disagreed, he would certainly have said so, while on the other hand, if he agreed there would also be a clear indication of this fact . . . Calvin was not hesitant to lay great stress upon the doctrine of *justification by faith alone*. While he admits that the qualifying term is never employed specifically in the Bible, he insists that the concept or idea is implicit in such passages as Romans 4:2ff; 1:17; 3:21; Galatians 3:10ff. The editor of the most recent English edition of the *Institutes* points out in a footnote how often in 3:17:7, 8, 10 the term *faith alone* is repeated. God is propitious to us as soon as we by faith rest *on the blood of Christ*, a phrase which he explains to mean the *whole work of expiation*. Thus since faith alone is the means by which one receives justification and reconciliation to God, the merit of every work *falls to the ground*. Therefore, if justification by faith alone is a specifically Lutheran doctrine, we must put Calvin in the Lutheran rather than in the Reformed camp.” W. Stanford Reid, “Justification By Faith According to John Calvin,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* (Vol. XLII, No. 2, Spring, 1980), pp. 290, 296.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary on Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1982), p. 148.

¹⁰ M. Horton, “Déjà vu All Over Again” *Modern Reformation* (July/Aug. 2004), p. 28.